

● *Three Days on the Wannsee with Literarisches Colloquium Berlin* ●

Readings & Discussions

Participants from Eighteen Countries



# Queer\*East

A Celebration of  
Literature, Music  
& Performance Art  
from Central &  
Eastern Europe

@  
Literarisches  
Colloquium  
Berlin

**1–3 August 2018**

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# Statements

assembled by Elisa Weinkötz

thanks to Anupam Siddharth, Ismar Hačam and all translators!

## Inhalt/Content

Zsófia Bán / Hungary .....	4
Jürgen Bauer / Austria .....	5
Nikolaj Bojkov / Bulgaria .....	6
Lavinia Braniște / Romania .....	8
Traude Bührmann / Germany.....	9
Ebru Celkan / Turkey.....	10
Neringa Dangvydė / Lithuania .....	12
Jacek Dehnel / Poland.....	13
Marie Feryna / Czech Republic .....	14
Davit Gabunia / Georgia .....	16
Anja Golob / Slovenia.....	17
Fabian Hischmann / Germany.....	18
Kristina Hočevar / Slovenia.....	19
Ulrich Hub / Germany .....	20
Damir Imamović / Bosnia-Herzegovina .....	21
Uladzislau Ivanoŭ / Belarus .....	22
Lejla Kalamujić / Bosnia-Herzegovina .....	23
Sergej Khasov-Cassia / Russia.....	24
Bojan Krivokapić / Serbia .....	25
Murathan Mungan / Turkey .....	26
Maxi Obexer / Italy & Germany.....	31
Dino Pešut / Croatia .....	33
Adrian Schiop / Romania .....	34
Natalka Sniadanko / Ukraine.....	35
Angela Steidele / Germany.....	37
Gulya Sultanova and Manny de Guerre / Russia .....	38
Kārlis Vērdiņš/ Latvia.....	40
Biographies .....	41

## Zsófia Bán / Hungary

### Literature and Activism: how do you define the role of writers in your society?

The role of the writer has been traditionally very prominent in Hungarian society since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Writers, poets have been symbolic revolutionary figures, leaders of political movements or representatives of political ideologies. The very act of using Hungarian language used to be a defiant gesture towards the idea(l) of freedom and independence. This traditional role survived well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the post-war Soviet rule and even after the political transition to the present. After 1989 many writers and intellectuals took on political positions, becoming members of Parliament, party leaders, or activists in civic groups and NGOs. Thus, the role of the writer in Hungary has always included a measure of public responsibility for providing a voice for the people, for minorities, as well as an expectation to reflect on the country's history. Most Hungarian writers take on this role as a matter of course, incorporating it in their work in different ways.

Recently, as Hungary is sliding ever more towards autocracy and adversarial voices are successfully being silenced by the nearly total cooptation of the media and by state capture in politics, this activist role of the independent writer/intellectual has become even more important. This is especially the case when the state chooses to masquerade as a democracy (albeit an "illiberal" one), pretending to guarantee a semblance of civil and minority rights, while in fact systematically undermining and curbing these rights in defiance of the regulations of the European Union. Writers who work with language and ideas need to be alert to how language itself is being captured in nationalist/populist propaganda in order to frame ideas, such as who is included in or excluded from the "nation", to scapegoat, which should sound the alarm in a country that actively collaborated in the extermination of 600 thousand of its own citizens during the second World War (including Jews, gays, Roma and political deportees). This escalating governmental practice is meant to undermine any practice or person who differs from the "norm" (including Roma, queer people, non-Christians, atheists, "liberals", etc.), or those who are branded as "foreign elements" (e.g. the Stop Soros law). We have just seen a motion to amend the constitution in order to criminalize anyone who helps the case of "illegal foreigners" (refugees) in any way (human rights NGOs or citizens' groups). This trend inevitably affects the situation of any minority group, as is made obvious by another recent motion in Parliament to amend the constitution with the intent to limit the right to assemble.

In such a situation, independent-minded Hungarian authors must resist the government's recurrent efforts to buy their loyalty and cannot but maintain their traditional role in giving voice to the cause of freedom, liberty and human rights.

## Jürgen Bauer / Austria

A confession: I've put off writing this statement for a long time. Why? A short digression, by way of explanation.

"Did you ever wonder why you haven't won awards? Why the gay press doesn't review your book?" the protagonist of Andrew Sean Greer's novel *Less* is asked. "Maybe I'm a bad writer?" he answers. But no, it's much worse. *Less* isn't a "bad writer," he's a "bad gay."

Does that apply to me too? I had to at least ask myself the question. Sure, there's a gay character in my novel *Das Fenster zur Welt*—but no one would call the text a gay novel, and certainly not a novel that engages questions of contemporary gay life. An activist book? Far from it. Maybe because I too am a "bad gay"?

Although: When I'm asked about traditions and models, the first thing that occurs to me is Dennis Coopers dirty snuff novels. And if there's one thing they're not, it's (politically correct) activism. More like: In-your-face brutality. Only—and here I have to admit it: That's not how I actually write.

Again (above all, considering the dangerous recent social and political changes): How self-confidently ought one write, how activistically, how brutally *must* one perhaps write when dealing with themes that touch one personally?

You've surely already noticed: There are a lot of question marks in this text. A lot of uncertainties. To confront myself with these uncertainties, I've started working on a new novel. It will be about gay history in Vienna, about activism and the struggle between assimilation and being in-your-face.

Even in the research phase, that means self-interrogation. I've never had so much respect for one of my topics—for any topic, really. But at some point you have to turn the question mark into a period.

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*

## Nikolaj Bojkov / Bulgaria

### I'll speak to you of love

I am a man who falls in love with men. Who makes love and makes a love with men (here is where I don't envy the translator, because in this sentence, the important thing is not just what is said, but also how it's said, and that's without even mentioning the play with the cliché, its reassertion, and then the going out of it; in Hungarian—the other language I know—I wouldn't be able to say this in the same way).

My texts don't only address this experience (they try to construct an authentic voice that calls by name and calls upon, that addresses a certain *You*, also telling it about the experience of madness, the experience of returning to this world, the experience of the double foreigner, the experience of searching for a home, the experience of betweenness, of existing in the in-between. A voice that asks (itself) and gets asked about the truth, one that speaks truth and truthfulness by testifying for them. That gives a voice to the other voices. That proclaims the miracle of life and the daily miracle of the here-and-now. And all this, while creating a rhythm, changing the rhythms, making way for the words and the sentences that love one another).

At a literary festival once, the Australian writer Alex Miller asked us why we wrote, and received various responses: because I can write, one person said; so that I can be understood by my son, another said; in order to give structure to the world, a third one answered. I told a joke: the centipede asked the millipede how it managed to synchronize its legs, and the millipede said, don't ask me, it took me such a long time to forget that question in order to start walking again. And a story: Once, I was taking a stroll around the Women's Market in Sofia, spotted a fish stand, and stopped by it; an old gypsy man appeared, who was so ugly that he was beautiful, carrying his four- or five-year old grandkid, who in a typical childish way kept screaming that he wanted some *djaba*; the grandfather—his face lit up and illuminated—promised the kid his *djaba*, then turned to the seller and asked for some *djaba*, but the seller said he didn't have any, the grandfather persisted, but you do, there it is, and was told that, no, there wasn't any to be had, and that was that; then softly and gently I asked, pointing at the carp, if maybe that was the *djaba*; the child was already gone, the seller told the gypsy man to scram but instead he helped himself to a sprat and tasted it, the seller yelled at him not to touch the merchandise, the gypsy man started dropping 20-stotinki coins, the seller was screaming, the gypsy man started screaming too, asking if this guy was a salesman or what, while I softly walked away, leaving behind the *djaba* and the garfish and the zander; I tried to take a deep breath, felt something suffocating rising up inside my throat, a wave of crying swelled up and overwhelmed me. I also told another

story, which I no longer remember, and later dedicated one of the poems from the collection *The Experience of Madness* to Alex Miller:

### **Dream of the Wall and Key<sup>1</sup>**

I slept huddled next to a wall of doors  
endless like a wall without end  
I woke up  
in my mouth was a key  
I unlocked the first closest door  
There in a windowless room  
huddled next to the wall opposite the door  
a man sat and slept  
in his mouth a key  
I woke him up  
and we went to wake up  
the others asleep  
behind other doors of white rooms  
Until I woke up

And if you were to ask me what this has to do with queer literature, my answer would be: I don't know, just like I don't know whether—apart from its themes—it has any literary specificity, and whether I might be turning my back on the question, in order to move on. And if you were to ask me where this text's title comes from: it is from a Bulgarian ballad, in which a man's voice, defining itself as the voice of an aging man, addresses somebody whose gender isn't textually determined, and calls upon that person to dream of him while he speaks to them of love.

Nikolaj Bojkov  
9 April, 2018, 5:49pm – 6:31pm

*Translated from Bulgarian by Ekaterina Petrova*

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<sup>1</sup> The poem was translated from the Bulgarian by Jonathan Dunne.

## **Lavinia Braniște / Romania**

Children's literature is a new enterprise in Romania. After 1989, the book market for children was neglected, few books were published and almost exclusively translations, of dubious quality as regards the text and the printing. Around 2010, professional collections began to appear dedicated to the genre and, today, nearly all the large publishers have an imprint, or at least a collection, dedicated to children's literature. In the last three years, the interest in Romanian authors of children's literature grew – a major influence on this trend being an annual manuscript contest from Arthur Publishing House that began in 2011, awarded to some of the best children's books written in the last years by local authors. We're just now at the beginning and, unfortunately, publishing houses at this point are extremely conservative and guarded concerning the themes of books chosen for publication. We're living at a time when manuscripts that tell the story of a grandparent's death, for example, are rejected, at a time when an author is asked to make a transgender character into a female character "to be clearer about what's going on with her." There are only two titles about same sex relationships on the children's book market now, from Arnold Lobel's Toad and Frog series, and both on the publisher's website and in the promotional material, they're presented as books about friendship. In a country where there are heated debates about rewriting an article from the Constitution in order to define marriage as the union between a man and a woman (not between two people, as it is now), in an area as uncertain as children's literature (where we have such little experience), we're a long way from queer themes.

*Translated from Romanian by Andrew Davidson*



## Traude Bührmann / Germany

### Notfalls erfinde

Die westeuropäischen queer\*bewegungen sind nicht ohne die hiesigen und in den USA aufbrechenden Frauen/Lesbenbewegungen Anfang der 1970er Jahre zu denken : manifestiert in Comingout Romanen (z.B. Verena Stefans « Häutungen »), in Aktionen, Projekten, autonomen Zentren, Festivals. Literarische Auto/Fiktionen waren meist mit gesellschaftspolitischem Engagement für lesbische Sichtbarkeit und dem Schaffen eigener denk/Räume verbunden.

Beispielhaft die französische Schriftstellerin Monique Wittig (1935-2003), die mit ihrem sprachlich erfindungsreichen fiktionalen, theoretischen und philosophischen Werk die internationalen Lesbenbewegungen und späteren queer\*bewegungen bis heute beeinflusst.

Bereits 1964 für ihren Jugendroman « L'Opoponax » mit renommierten französischen Literaturpreis ausgezeichnet, legt sie mit anderen Feministinnen 1970 am Grab des unbekanntes Soldaten in Paris einen Kranz für die unbekanntes Frau des unbekanntes Soldaten nieder. Dieser Tag geht als Eckdatum für den Beginn der französischen Frauenbefreiungsbewegung MLF in die Geschichte ein. Bald darauf gründet Monique Wittig mit Gleichgesinnten die erste Lesbengruppe « Les gouines rouges ».

Ihre Bücher beziehen sich auf lesbisches Leben und dessen Visionen mit inspirierendem Tenor wie : « notfalls erfinde » oder « die Welt gehört uns ». Mit ihren eindeutigen Inhalten und Titeln wie « le corps lesbien » (1973) sinkt ihr Stern am französischen Literaturhimmel.

Theoretikerin eines materialistischen Feminismus, der von einer Klassengesellschaft der Geschlechter ausgeht, und die Heterosexualität als politisches System analysiert, veröffentlicht Wittig - inzwischen in den USA lebend - ihre Essays (1976-1990) im Sammelband « The straight mind ». Im gleichnamigen Aufsatz (1980) treten Lesben aus der Kategorie « Frau » der heterosexuellen Geschlechterzwänge heraus. Fazit : « Lesben sind keine Frauen ». Was bedeutet dieses vielseitig debattierte statement für die aktuellen feministischlesbischen, queeren\* Bewegungen?

## **Ebru Celkan / Turkey**

### **The King is dead. Yallah QUEER!**

"Lubunca" (Loo-boon-ja) is a kind of lingo used by LGBTIQ+ individuals in Turkey. It goes back to the seventeenth century. Also known as "gay slang," Lubunca includes words from Gypsy language, Rum Greek and Arabic. Rooted in the time of the old hybrid culture of Ottoman Istanbul, it is a language homosexuals use to communicate so "others" won't understand what they say, in order to keep themselves hidden and protected. This "subculture/language" was pushed underground with the fall of the Ottomans and has continued to thrive in Turkey, while its like in Greece (Kaliarda) and England (Polari) have been forgotten.

Is it possible to imagine a new world if we don't have a language?

This Lubunca, made up of words from various languages spoken in the geography where it thrives, is something I have recourse to in the plays I write, and occasionally in daily life and interviews. I don't want to make Lubunca more widely known, but at the same time I think it has the firepower to ignite the imagination and bring about a crisis in the hegemonic language. I also experiment with constructing sentences in Lubunca that include words from Turkish, English, Kurdish, Arabic, German and other languages.

The status quo establishes itself powerfully in language. It broadcasts the language it establishes widely, enshrining it through endless repetition. It makes language simple by reducing it to binary propositions. Thus it has no trouble propagating the binary system of thought of which majorities are fond. Its mental map and "boundless!" lexical inheritance divides us, usually in two: woman versus man, native versus immigrant, Western versus Eastern... all of this belongs to us. We have achieved that richness thanks mostly to white male writers, historians, scientists, publishers, etc. The inheritance of kings.

It is time to reject that inheritance.

Using Lubunca, and making sentences out of different languages, has been and continues to be a way for me to separate myself from the status quo. It is also a playful, joyous and effective way to make chinks in the dominant/hegemonic/oppressive language. Language is an important field of possibility/creativity/hope for writers/resisters/advocates of change. In dark times the importance of writing in a language that investigates the possibilities of struggle, that gives quarter to human variety and tests mental potential, is not to be underestimated. For me every sentence I share that fractures binary mentalities is a victory.

I look for how to construct a language that carries desire, not the desire to bring the marginal to the center, but to destroy the center itself.

We need a language that will make it possible for us to regard words, and then feelings and human relationships, with radical hope. We need writers with the courage to establish their own language independently of reality outside. Maybe you would like to try too.

So, Yallah! On to Queer writing...

*Translated from Turkish by Victoria Holbrook*

## **Neringa Dangvydė / Lithuania**

My book of children's fairy tales, *The Amber Heart*, was published in 2013. The publication was funded by the Lithuanian University of Education in collaboration with the Lithuanian Council for Culture. However, shortly after the publication of *The Amber Heart*, a few members of the Lithuanian parliament reached out to the Lithuanian University of Education expressing their concern regarding the content and subjects of the book. The claim was forwarded to the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics. And in 2014, a public statement was issued declaring the two stories, "How the King's Sons Were Looking for Wisdom" and "About the princess, the shoemaker's daughter and twelve brothers who were singing as nightingales" to be potentially harmful to individuals under the age of 14. This was based on the fact that these particular two stories were about same sex couples, who got married and lived happily ever after. According to the current Lithuanian Law on the Protection of Minors, any public information that mentions or encourages any form of family different from the one indicated in the Lithuanian Constitution is considered to be "harmful".

Following this statement, the Lithuanian University of Education publicly changed their opinion on the book, declaring *The Amber Heart* to be "annotated propaganda of homosexuality" and stopping its distribution and sales. The author sued the Lithuanian University of Education over its actions. The decision of the court was that the University must lift the ban on sales and distribution, with one condition, however. The condition was that from now on, all copies of *The Amber Heart* could only be distributed and sold with a parental advisory sticker stating that the book was potentially harmful to anyone under 14 years of age.

The author does not agree with this and is still fighting for *The Amber Heart* to be sold as any other children's book would be. Notably, it is singular in Lithuanian literature for a book to be banned, completely taken out of sales and then returned with a restriction upon it. With the help of various local human rights organisations, a second edition of *The Amber Heart* has been published in 2015, but the court proceedings and fight over the first edition of *The Amber Heart* continue to this day.

## Jacek Dehnel / Poland

### The Transparent Pink

Over a decade ago, as a young poet, I was invited to Slovenia for a poetry workshop organized by the Literature Across Frontiers. There was a common theme: we were all gay poets writing in „small languages”: Latvian, Gaelic, Slovene, Basque and Polish. I felt it was an odd choice of the organizer – firstly because I just had my first book of poems published and didn't feel like I deserved the invitation, and secondly because my language (although undoubtedly peripheral) is spoken by approximately ten times more native speakers than all the other mentioned above combined. But then sticking out and feeling odd is perhaps the basic gay thing (and there are worse things than sticking out because of a large size too), so there I was, translating and being translated with English as the bridge between our poems and experiences.

I doubted it could work – translating is a tricky matter and using a third language complicates things even more. But in the end it did work unexpectedly well and even found its continuation in a book of Karlis Verdins' prose poems that I published a few years later. What had surprised me though was a conversation we had one of those evenings at our dinner table.

We were in our twenties, forties and fifties, coming from both sides of the Iron Curtain, recently merged into one European Union – from a former Soviet Republic, a Catholic post-Communist country, from the Tito's multinational utopia that had fallen into pieces, Franco's right-wing regime, troubled Ireland. The experiences of our nations, languages and ourselves differed a lot, and yet there was one single thing we had in common: none of us liked the idea of being called a „gay poet”. Which was, one should remember, the main reason why we had been gathered together.

Sure, we were all gay (and out) and we were all poets; some even centered their poetry around gay-related themes. But such labeling sounded to all of us as a brutal shortening of our work's horizons, curbing it, diminishing.

I write love poems – and, although they speak of gay love, I think (moreover: I know) that straight people, men and women, discover their own experiences in those lines, cross the boundaries of labels. The same goes for myself: if I feel a pang while reading Larkin's or Rilke's love poem, I don't think of it as of reading a „straight poem” by a „straight poet”. Nor do I suddenly feel straight at the bottom of my heart.

This is, obviously, an ongoing problem of all the minorities: our situation forces us to struggle, which means that things that are absolutely normal and transparent we have to point out as special; we have to fight for the emancipation, come out, walk in gay prides, wave the flags. We have to shout: „Pink!” or „Rainbow!” only to be noticed and to slowly muscle in to get an equal position. In which the pink should become natural, neutral, transparent. As it is.

## Marie Feryna / Czech Republic

### Queering the map...of poetry

*Queering the map* is an interactive project whose constantly changing and expanding result is a map of so-called queer experiences—experiences, that is, that the cis-heterosexual majority of people likely don't have. For a person of minority identity, however, such a map can be extremely meaningful. Hana Kuncová puts it well in her essay for Radio Wave: "The pins hold a message for other users—whatever they're going through, they're not alone." Not every space is queer-friendly, not every space is safe for queer people. It's similar in literature, including in poetry. We can turn the strategy of queer reading to countless texts, but are their authors who explicitly profess queerness? At any point in literary history? In the current literary world? In the following paragraphs I try to answer this question in the positive. I try to describe how I queered the map...of poetry.

**Adam Borzič** is a poet, translator, the chief editor of the literary magazine *Tvar*, and a board member of the writers' association Asociace spisovatelů. He has published three books of poetry: *Rozevírání*, *Počasí v Evropě* and *Orfické linie*. "Pushkin excites me. / He comes to me at night, / has a lamp in his hand / and wooden shoes on his feet. // He lights the lamp. / Undresses me / and greases my ass / with goose fat. // Then he glues my mouth shut / and orders me to sing." In his language, in his texts, I find myself one moment at a bacchanal, the next in the middle of a humanitarian crisis, then meditating with ghosts, phantoms of philosophers from all of world history. Borzič's material is broad, but never hackneyed. Everything all at once, but precise, unpretentious. Observing everything, literally swimming in impressions, but not wasting them. Knowing exactly what to use when so that in the end, not only the author, but the readers too are "Drug Dancing Queers / Criminal Queers." If the project *Fever Ray* had a literary counterpart, it would be Adam Borzič.

**Aleš Kauer** works in poetry, visual art, and music. He's written many books, most recently the intermedial tryptich *Giotto & xerox*, *Monet & money* and *Man Ray & boy*. He also founded the press *Adolescent*. "In your face / is a hole from my eye / and vice versa. / And surrounding us terrible dust, / the disappeared outline of an insinuation. / You are my drifted focus. / My future fall to solar." These lines are from the book *Vně/Mně*—a collection that I consider one of the best examples of contemporary love poetry. Here love is not spoken of in the blithing way or against in the backdrops of the monotonous cis-heterosexual world. If we imagine *Vně/Mně* as a space, a habitable room, the whole thing would definitely be covered in glitter. There would be boys, androgynes, and drag queens, all dancing in intense flashing light: "The next day you've already undressed between the continents / Europe — Asia, / as if you want to forget your past."

**Kamil Bouška** probably wouldn't call himself a queer poet, though I read this dimension strongly in his work: his queerness is an attempt to free himself from everything that bothers him about people and their conformity and comfortability. But he doesn't just write reactively. He knows perfectly well that he too, is different: "when I spread my arms / the light in me grows black." But it wouldn't be good to confine oneself just to literary creation: "Thinking orphically means dying / giving up conventions and rules / rising from the dead / and speaking in your own language of everything / and each and every thing individually." Thus ends a paragraph of his essay on orphic thinking for the magazine *Prostor*—it turns into a poem. A poem against simple solutions for dealing with one's own life. If this means thinking and living orphically, poetically, then one would have to destroy the concept of the "person" as it is conventionally understood. Bouška's work is queer in its own way, but certainly dark compared to the others. But its light cannot be dimmed.

This list only contains authors who identify as men? There are no authors from modern Czech literary history? I answer both questions with a clear yes. For that's the principle of "queering the map." Three poets as a selection from a queer person's reading. Three poets as lifeline.

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*

## **Davit Gabunia / Georgia**

### **Do we write to fight or do we fight to write?**

Queer writing in Georgia is still taking its baby-steps, couple of writers have emerged here and there; all this was made possible in recent years (not earlier than 2000s) alongside with the development of LGBTQ civil movement in the country. In the beginning these were merely incidental short-stories (or other shorter texts) that would appear in off-mainstream literary periodicals. Nowadays it is a growing number of authors that openly touch upon queer issues; discuss them more or less freely during public readings or presentations of their books. To name some of them: Tamta Melashvili, Zura Abashidze, Guram Matskhonashvili, Tamar Tandashvili, Rati Ratiani, Anuki Burduli, myself (Davit Gabunia) and some more. These voices are loud nowadays, cannot be neglected or silenced, and literary critics are actually “forced” to take into consideration their existence. Though, the most common form of backlash we experience, in an extremely conservative society, is the claim that this is not “literature” but a form of activism; this approach implies there is a detached, canonic “high literature” and we do not belong there, as we are following the trendy “liberal agenda”. This causes a bitter sense of frustration among the authors who write about queer issues, some of them (not many, though) do not wish to be identified merely as “gay activists” rather than “real writers”. But, anyway, the climate is changing and this process is irreversible. If I had to hide myself under a pen-name in 2005, while being a beginning writer tormented with insecurities, nowadays I can openly offer a mainstream text, even a local best-seller with a clearly queer plotline. So, queer activism and literature cross each other all the time in Georgia, because it is still an issue of representation, a future fight to win.



## **Anja Golob / Slovenia**

### **Basic starting points**

1. Can a man be a lesbian?

- Only a positive answer would namely justify my invitation to this event, as it would establish 'being a lesbian' as a political stance, potentially available to anyone. Further on, how is it different from 'being a feminist'?

2. How to not see 'East' as a derogatory label?

- In a political sense, the existence of 'East' has always been determined by the West, never by the East itself. East always serves as a handy deprivation, e. g. a partner bringing extra funds in the EU tenders. Is this fact (also) keeping the gap alive?

3. Why does the LGBTQI+ like to so much enforce and celebrate its ghetto label?

- Life with the safety net of a community is surely easier, yet shouldn't exactly the minorities understand, allow and even stimulate individual voices, particularly those voicing reasonable doubts about the life and work of the minority? Does the minority treat its own minorities any different than it is treated itself by the majority? Why does it feel to be so attacked by anyone who thinks differently? Why does it not even want to look beyond the personal engagement? This way, how will the personal ever become political?

4. Do you truly want equality?

- Equality presupposes compromises, reaching smallest common ground, unification, and leads to the narcissism of small differences. I would rather strive for my right to stand alone and think for myself. Taking solitude upon oneself is an ontological condition for freedom, and freedom is the precondition to all things worth fighting for.

## Fabian Hischmann / Germany

### Role Models

The first time I fell in love with a boy it was a happy kind of misery. Nothing special, pretty standard, some will groan. But every heart races and breaks in its own way.

2003.

W. is already an artist. Though we're barely more than children. He paints gloomy things on canvas and sprays clever things on the walls of our tiny Black Forest village. We meet in a friend's car. W., like me, doesn't speak Alemanic. My maternal relatives come from North Rhine-Westphalia, his from Kazakhstan. He's recorded an Eels album onto a cassette and he rolls down the window: *Fresh Feeling*.

2004.

W. and I are sitting by the ruins of a castle.

A week earlier a "friend" of mine had outed me at a party after a fight and told W. how I felt about him. I'd run away before he could talk to me.

"Is it true?" he asks.

I nod.

"I take it as a great compliment," he says.

Then we stare straight ahead for a long time, not speaking.

At some point W. says: "I have something for you."

2018.

Even back then, W. was an exceptional artist. Because though he wasn't in love with me, he wasn't in love with himself, either. Luckily for me, W. was an *enfant empathique*. Though we've lost touch, though he broke my heart, W. remains a role model for me.

And by the way, when we were sitting by the ruins, W. gave me a book called *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. A story of queer teenagers.

Nothing special, pretty standard, some will groan.

But even back then, I liked that kind of story.

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*

## Kristina Hočevar / Slovenia

Slovenian literary production and publication – and here I am focusing only on the Slovenian poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries – have recurrently presented us with new names: Brane Mozetič, a highly prolific editor of the ŠKUC Lambda and Aleph series, had his first book of poems, *Modrina dotika* (The Blueness of Touch), published in 1986 by a big mainstream publisher – Mladinska knjiga. Majda Kne had had her book of poems, *Ko bo s čudovito gladkim gibom ukazala finale* (When with a Wonderfully Smooth Move She Calls for the Finale), published by the same publisher in 1980. Kne was the first in contemporary Slovenian poetry to include, albeit very discreetly, lesbian motifs. Following these two authors, Nataša Velikonja had her first, unambiguously lesbian book of poems published by ŠKUC Lambda in 1994. In 2003 ŠKUC Vizibilija published Sara Lubej's *Hladen pot* (Cold Sweat), and a year later, in 2004, the gay author Gašper Malej had his first book of poems published by ŠKUC Lambda, while my first book, *V pliš* (Into Plush), was published by a mainstream publisher – Cankarjeva založba – in the same year.

The very significant anthologies of contemporary European gay poetry – *Moral bi spet priti* (You Should Have Come Again) – and contemporary European lesbian poetry – *Brez besed ji sledim* (I Follow Her without Words) – were published by ŠKUC Lambda in 2009 and 2015 respectively. ŠKUC Lambda has been publishing LGBTQ literature and theory since 1990, and ŠKUC Vizibilija has been focusing on Slovenian and translated literature with lesbian themes as well as LGBTQ and feminist theory since 1998.

In terms of LGBTQ poetry and prose publication, the Slovenian literary environment of the last ten or fifteen years seems to have been relatively open; new names have emerged, literary criticism and reviewing have developed, prizes have been awarded to LGBTQ authors.

As welcome as it is, this process may turn out to be a double-edged sword. What happens when difference disappears?

*Translated from Slovenian by Andrej Zavrl*

## **Ulrich Hub / Germany**

A positive review of a new book about the experiences of a gay man ends with the words: "You don't have to be gay to enjoy this book." Finally someone's said it! Other authors have been less lucky. Offhand, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky come to mind: "You don't have to be a murderer to get something out of *Crime and Punishment*." I've come across that sentence about as often as I've seen this at the entrance to the theatre: "You don't have to be noble to like *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*."

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*

## Damir Imamović / Bosnia-Herzegovina

What is “sevdah”?

«Sevdah» or «sevdalinka» is a traditional performing genre originating in a wider area of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its main element is a song «sevdalinka» which is traditionally referred to as the «song of sevdah» (Tur. Sevdah = love; Pers. Sawda = black, black bile, melancholy). Principal modes of transmission within the genre are (1) orally transmitted poetry in Mid South Slavic language and (2) local musical heritage of the region, historically strongly influenced by the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian musical sphere and overall modernization processes.

Why is sevdah important?

Today is “sevdah” a modern musical genre deeply rooted in traditional culture. In the last couple of decades its conservative facets started breaking and giving way to new, emancipatory tendencies. More and more, it painted a different picture of the genre and its past. Since the traditional culture in the Balkans always had a strong influence on a contemporary world view, this change proves to be very fruitful: both intellectually and creatively.

Sevdah's own positioning of the queer

Seems like the tradition of oral poetry in the Balkans had its own ways of dealing with the concept of queer. There is even a word I would suggest as sevdah's own version of “queer”: “ludo”. First meaning of “ludo” is “crazy” but the scope of its use in different songs shows other peculiar meanings that cannot be subsumed under “crazy”. Such are: “odd”, “carried away”, “unusual”, in short: everything that is against the patriarchal norm, against “good customs” or contrary to a habitual understanding of things.

Conservative strategies of covering the traces of the queer

The genre of sevdah (as well as other traditional genres) have been co-formed by an army of editors, national activists and ideologues. Once we see through their strategies of shaping the genre, we realize that many of their workings are still live and kicking in contemporary culture. During the panel examples will be given in hopes to stir discussion and, perhaps, show some common tendencies elsewhere.

## Uladzislau Ivanou / Belarus

The fairy-tale of my gayness is, surely, also the fairy-tale of my generation that managed to rise miraculously when the pressure of the authorities, ideology was uplifted in the early 90s of the already last century. Before and after it was much harder for the young as well as all for the others – they live, grow up in the conditions of prejudices, inhibitions, panic and amalgam, strengthening of patriarchate idiocy. My own fairy-tale was partly possible due to a certain freedom of the time. Now, I think, for the vast majority of gays and lesbian in Belarus, and even in the whole region, this fairy-tale is impossible, tabooed. It is scaring, but in the current terrible prose of life the state has some trouble in creating obstacles for the young people to grow, develop and prosper freely and variously, because of its ignorance and one-sidedness it caused numerous deaths, countless suicides and twisted fates of people, who were not given that fairy-tale, or, simply put, the choice to be oneself. I had this choice, I used it. I guess I belong to the privileged one, to the lucky ones. Isn't it because of this now I write about it all and testify it all?

And yet I can't avoid mentioning the influence of literature, surely, foreign belles-lettres, on my positive perception of myself. European and Western literature in general had a great if not the greatest impact on me apart from music and cinema from the West. The novels and novellas by French and Belgian decadents (Rachilde, Eekhoud, Lorrain) and subsequent writers (Gide, Thomas and especially Klaus Mann, Colette, Woolfe, Yourcenar, Beauvoir, Leduc, Genet, Mishima, Tremblay, Harpman, Rochefort, Peyrefitte, etc.) completely destroyed the doubts and fears, and strengthened my belief even more. Unfortunately, our literature, though rich, though beautiful, is too proper and moralistic, and thus it is not really useful for gays and lesbians, they seek for support outside. Literature became for me a real replacement of the faith in God, in whom I have never believed but whom all around suddenly started to believe. I think that literature and religion are similar in that way – they explain the world and the person. Literature saved me and explained everything to me, having finally become my academy, my certificate into the adulthood.

## Lejla Kalamujić / Bosnia-Herzegovina

### Radical Love

*“Love is the best, most insidious, most effective instrument of social repression.”*

*Rainer Werner Fassbinder*

In the course of the discussion, I wish to present a comparative analysis of three recent queer novels from the former Yugoslavia. These novels are, in order of publication: *Do isteka zaliha* (Till Stocks Last) by Nora Verde (Croatia), *U zoni* (In the Zone), by Lamija Begagić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and *Papirne disko kugle* (Paper Disco Balls) by Dragoslava Barzut (Srbija). The backbone of all three novels is a lesbian relationship (its disintegration, denial and survival, respectively) in a post-Yugoslav space. I wish to demonstrate that writing about love between two women is a radical position which the authors consciously assume in order to depict and demask, each in her own way, the fundamental social norm, both learnt and received. The path of *radical love* in all three novels is in fact a path of deconstruction, but also of resistance to the *reality-as-it-is-today*.

*Translated from Bosnian by Mirza Purić*

## **Sergej Khasov-Cassia / Russia**

In the 1990-s Russian society was opened up towards all sorts of Western cultural influence. After years of censorship and samizdat Russians suddenly faced an entire world of literature (as well as cinema, theatre) that was hitherto closed for them. As well as old authors new ones appeared and as the interest in everything new was high, publishing houses were replying to this demand. The state was too weak then to manage these processes; the Church was just recovering from 70 years oppression so they could barely take care of public morals.

In the years 2000 and further into 2010 the country took a rather conservative path. This coincided with the time of relative hydrocarbon prosperity and so the state together with religious institutes has got to subjects of morals, educational and cultural values some of which were considered as alien to Russian traditions including LGBTQ issues. Publishing houses as business bodies replied to these changes: the majority of them just stopped publishing anything that threatened to be scandalous as well as big book stores started to avoid this type of literature. Nowadays there are only a couple of publishing houses that publish queer texts and these projects are not profitable. So if it is generally complicated for a young writer whatever queer or heterosexual to make his or her text published, this is even more so when it's queer. When I was sending over my first book *Another Childhood* to different publishing houses, very few responded at all, saying that though they liked the novel it doesn't correspond with their policy. Similar problems were awaiting the second novel.

At the same time I feel a still high demand on the queer literature. I guess no one can stop progress, more and more people come out of the closet and so they widen their reading behavior. There are young LGBTQ people all over the world who don't want to live the same life as their parents, and Russia is not an exception. These people are maybe not a lucrative source of business but they do exist and a good part of them find the needed spiritual nourishment in the Internet. When I published both books of mine I was receiving a quite a number of messages from youngsters who were thanking me for sharing my experience as it was helping them somehow to cope with theirs.

This raises hope that Russian queer literature will keep going, the audience will demand more of different types of texts and this will encourage more people to write even without hopes of being published as a regular paper author. And who knows maybe after the country would make another turn and forbidden subjects would cease being so, we will see big names of queer Russian speaking writers who would take an important place in the world literature.



## **Bojan Krivokapić / Serbia**

It seems that post-Yugoslav literature has been featuring more and more queer motives and elements of late, which is to say that questioning and rejecting the dominant heteronormative matrix is becoming increasingly widespread in (younger) authors who write in the mutually intelligible languages of the former Yugoslavia.

But is it really so?

There have been more and more queer story/poem contests over the last few years, for instance Queer Montenegro, Okvir Sarajevo, etc. In addition, the portal *lgbti.ba* has introduced a literary section named *Queer čitaonica* (Queer Reading Hall). These are just some of the new places where literature which deals with queer culture and relationships is concentrated. Lejla Kalamujić, Dragoslava Barzut, Miloš Ilić, Lamija Begagić and Anes Osmić count among authors who, for some time now, have been introducing queer into the contemporary literary field as an equal, rather than an exclusive category. They are not the only ones, of course, but their texts lend themselves well to a discussion of possible ways of creating literature which doesn't acquiesce to the dominant patriarchal matrix and the power positions it dictates. Furthermore, creative writing workshops are some of the important places for a continual exploration of the queer-text relationship.

In my presentation I will draw attention to the above-mentioned authors, Belgrade publishing house Red box and its series *Zvijezde*, as well as the creative writing workshops I have been running continuously since 2012, in different spaces (and places), with different students.

*Translated from Serbian by Mirza Purić*

## **Murathan Mungan / Turkey**

### **Die Geheimniswunde**

Als Kinder können wir mit all unseren kleinen Sorgen und Nöten zu unseren Eltern kommen, angefangen damit, dass wir Hunger oder Kopfweg haben, nicht schlafen wollen, einen Teller kaputtgemacht oder im Rechnen eine schlechte Note bekommen haben. Ob Kummer, Trauer oder Wünsche, wir können ihnen alles mitteilen, und wenn wir an irgendwas schuld sind, drücken wir zunächst vielleicht ein wenig herum, aber irgendwann geben wir es zu. Dann sind uns die Eltern vielleicht böse, doch wir wissen schon, wie wir sie um den Finger wickeln können, und früh entdecken wir auch, wie sich das Schmollen als Waffe einsetzen lässt.

Am Beispiel der Eltern und der Erwachsenen ganz allgemein lernen wir auch, wie man lügt und sich etwas erschleicht, doch braucht man uns nur ein bisschen zuzusetzen, dann gestehen wir sogleich alles. Später dann, in dem Alter, in dem man zusammen mit den Eltern schmunzelnd auf kleine, damals verborgen gebliebene Jugendsünden zurückblickt, gibt man auch mal zu, dass man seinerzeit dem Vater Geld aus der Tasche gestohlen, als kleines Mädchen im Treppenhaus den Nachbarsjungen geküsst, die Schule geschwänzt und stattdessen Fußball gespielt, der Tante eine Haarspange geklaut oder ein Fahrrad kaputtgemacht und die Schuld auf jemand anderen geschoben hatte.

Als Kind ist man geneigt, sich gängigen Anschauungen und Denkweisen anzuschließen, ganz abgesehen davon, dass man erst mal gar keine andere Wahl hat, als den Erwachsenen zu glauben, was sie so erzählen. Unsere ersten Entscheidungen treffen wir somit unter deren Anleitung und treten in ihre Fußstapfen, wenn es etwa darum geht, für welchen Fußballverein wir sein sollen. Grob gesagt sind Eltern nicht erpicht darauf, dass ihre Kinder eigene Vorlieben entwickeln; viel lieber ist es ihnen, wenn sich in den Kleinen der Geschmack der Eltern widerspiegelt. Sie sagen gerne „Ganz der Vater!“ oder „Wie die Mutter!“, und noch schöner ist es, wenn sie von anderen in dieser Ansicht bestärkt werden, denn eine solche Ähnlichkeit gilt ihnen als Vertrauen einflößendes Merkmal einer bestimmten Konstanz. Unter „Kindeswohl“ verstehen denn auch die meisten Eltern nicht, dass sich bei den Kindern ein von jeglichen Erwartungen unabhängiges Glück einstellt, sondern dass die Vorlieben und Interessen der Sprösslinge gewissermaßen im Rahmen bleiben, und das gehört zu den grundsätzlichen Lehren, die dem Kind mittelbar oder unmittelbar mit auf den Weg gegeben werden. So werden die Kinder unauffällig mit dem „Gesetz der Begierde“ vertraut gemacht. Die Begierden selbst werden sich erst mit der Zeit einstellen, doch die Gesetze stehen von vornherein fest. Kinder, die sich darauf einlassen, werden diese Gesetze als die Lebenswirklichkeit an sich kennenlernen, als von der Gesellschaft abgesegnete unverrückbare Übereinkunft, und sie bereiten sich darauf vor, mit ihrem Leben an etwas anzuknüpfen, was ihre Eltern selbst gelebt hatten oder doch am liebsten gelebt hätten. Aus derlei Gründen wird das Leben so manches Menschen dafür aufgeopfert, dass er als Kind oder Jugendlicher nur

ja von seinen Leitfiguren Bestätigung findet. Zu einem immer mehr auf den Beifall anderer Menschen ausgerichteten Leben wird nur der nicht verurteilt, der genügend Verstand, Mut oder einfach Glück aufbringt, um die vorgekauften Wahrheiten und Werte zu hinterfragen und daraus Konsequenzen zu ziehen. Dabei belastet es einen Menschen auf sehr nachhaltige Weise, wenn er seine Gefühle nicht ausleben kann und sich fortwährend verstellen muss.

In so gut wie jeder Familie gibt es bestimmte Geheimnisse, gewisse Lügen. Manche Familiengeheimnisse sind sogar so dunkler Natur, dass die Kinder dadurch wie zu Schlafwandlern werden, um in der Welt, in der sie eingeschlossen sind, nur ja nichts zu sehen, zu erahnen oder zu verstehen. Um ein künstliches Gleichgewicht aufrechtzuerhalten, schließen viele Menschen mit sich selbst einen geheimen Pakt, ohne das überhaupt zu bemerken. Um solche Geheimnisse geht es mir hier allerdings nicht.

In psychologischen Werken ist die Rede davon, dass die in der Pubertät stattfindende Individualisierung sich um ein Geheimnis herum artikulieren kann. Bei jener Art von Geheimnis geht es darum, dass der Jugendliche sich eine eigene Welt aufbaut, deren Grenzen er selbst bestimmt und zu der Erwachsene keinen Zugang haben. Aber auch das meine ich hier nicht. Das Geheimnis, von dem ich berichten möchte, ist ganz anderer Natur.

Wenn die Nöte und Schmerzen erwähnt werden, die man in Kinderjahren erfährt, fühlen sie viele dazu beflissen, derlei grundsätzlich über den gleichen Kamm zu scheren. Als ich einmal darauf verwies, dass jemand, der in der Kindheit nicht gelitten habe, nicht die für künstlerische Kreativität unabdingbare existenzielle Not erfahren habe und daher eine „durch und durch glückliche Kindheit“ nicht zu einem Leben als Schriftsteller oder Maler führen könne, hielt mir ein Freund entgegen, es gebe doch sowieso niemanden, der in der Kindheit nie gelitten habe, Kinder seien doch alle irgendwie gleich und wüchsen auf die gleiche Art auf. Dabei sind Kinder genauso wie Katzen alle unterschiedlich, darüber täuscht nur hinweg, dass sie sich so ähnlich sehen. Wer nicht genau hinsieht, dem fallen bei Kind und Katze lediglich die Übereinstimmungen auf.

Als ich klein war, teilte ich wie viele Kinder meine Wünsche, Wehwehchen und Freuden den Eltern mit. Wie andere Kinder auch schmolte und grollte ich, zierte mich, war frech. Über eins aber konnte ich nie mit meinen Eltern sprechen, nämlich darüber, dass ich schon als kleiner Junge entdeckte, dass ich mich zum eigenen Geschlecht hingezogen fühlte, und dass ich bald auch schon wusste, dass es dafür einen Begriff gab. Schon in der Grundschule hatte es begonnen, dass ich in andere Jungen verliebt war, ja diese eigentlich verehrte, noch ganz ohne sexuelle Fantasien, aber doch im Bewusstsein dafür, dass das etwas mit Sexualität zu tun hatte. Ich hätte später, wie so mancher, mir selbst oder auch anderen gegenüber das Ganze als so eine Art „göttliche Liebe“ abtun können, wie etwa der persische Mystiker Rumi und der Derwisch Schams sie für einander empfunden hatten, aber das tat ich nicht. In einer Familie, in der ansonsten viel miteinander geredet wurde, wuchs ich somit mit einem Geheimnis auf. Und mit der Wunde, die jenes Geheimnis mir schlug. Einer frühen Wunde, durch die die Eltern sich

einem entfremden. Darum kann es nicht stimmen, dass wir alle als Kinder das gleiche Leid erfahren.

Für meine Kinderschultern war es eine schwere Last, mit einem Geheimnis zu leben, von dem nur ich allein wusste, und unendlich viel Mühe aufzuwenden, damit nur ja niemand davon erfuhr. Wer in frühem Alter solche Neigungen in sich entdeckt, fühlt sich noch dazu den Eltern gegenüber permanent schuldig. Sobald man sich seiner Natur bewusst ist, wird einem auch klar, dass man ganz anders aufwächst als die anderen Kinder, unter einem Unstern gleichsam. Wie gesagt ist das kein Geheimnis, das man später unter Gelächter enthüllen kann, sondern eines, von dem man innerlich abgestempelt wird. Und ein Geheimnis heißt Einsamkeit, und für ein Kind bedeutet das frühe und damit große Einsamkeit, vor allem, weil man sich selbst zum „Problem“ wird und nicht wegen anderen leidet, sondern wegen sich selbst.

Wenn ein Kind weiß, dass es sich dem unterwerfen muss, was andere von einem erwarten, bzw. dem, von dem es meint, dass andere es erwarten, fürchtet es, sich dagegen aufzulehnen, und bemüht sich, die eigenen Wünsche und auch Möglichkeiten zu unterdrücken, und dafür betreibt es einen unsichtbaren Aufwand, der fürchterlich an ihm zehrt. Wer ganz allein auf sich gestellt einen für so ein Alter nicht erwartbaren Kraftakt bewältigen muss, nimmt daran mehr oder weniger seelischen Schaden. Je mehr er sich mit diesem aus eigenen Kräften nicht zu lösenden Problem herumschlägt, um so mehr fühlt er in sich einen kräftigen Baum heranwachsen, der immer mehr Wurzeln schlägt. Seine ganze Existenz über wird so ein Kind sich nie mehr so allein, so wehrlos, so unwissend und so verzweifelt fühlen. Während es heranwächst, wird es mit dem Wortschatz gesellschaftlicher Erniedrigung vertraut und bekommt schauernd eine Ahnung davon, wie es mit seiner Geschlechtlichkeit einmal auf dem Pranger stehen wird. Durch die Angst, die Liebe der Eltern und die Anerkennung der Erwachsenen einzubüßen, zieht es um das Geheimnis herum einen Zaun aus lauter giftigen Pfählen, und die Tür dazu ist ein mit Kompromissen und Schuldgefühlen beladenes Leben. So besteht das Schicksal von Homosexuellen oft genug daraus, dass sie den dunklen Gesetzen einer dunklen öffentlichen Meinung folgend ihre Begierden unterdrücken und voller Scham leben. Sie erleiden die Qual, sich selbst nicht akzeptieren zu können, bevor sie nicht auch von den anderen akzeptiert werden, und sind gleichsam dazu verurteilt, sich vor der Gesellschaft für ihre Existenz entschuldigen müssen, und so geht das die Kindheit über, die Jugend, und manchmal das ganze Leben.

Natürlich sind nicht bei jedem Menschen die Nöte des Heranwachsens und das im Einzelnen Erlebte gleich, es spielen da persönliche und gesellschaftliche Faktoren hinein, die man nicht gegeneinander ausspielen sollte. Und natürlich birgt jeder Mensch verschiedene „Ichs“ in sich, doch wenn man schon als Kind zwischen sich und den anderen einen so grundsätzlichen Unterschied entdeckt und begreift, dass in seinem Leben eine Andersartigkeit, ein ureigenes Geheimnis ist, dann kann das mit der Zeit quälende Dimensionen annehmen, denn man ahnt, wie sehr man später für seine Eltern und sein ganzes Umfeld zum Quell der Schande werden könnte. Es ist so schwer, damit fertig zu werden, ohne sich an den Vater anlehnen,

sich bei der Mutter ausweinen oder sein Geheimnis mit irgendjemandem zu besprechen zu können, dass man sich in dieser Hinsicht seinen Eltern und Geschwistern nicht weniger entfremdet als allen anderen Menschen auch.

Die Entdeckung der Sexualität als geheimnisvoller, fragwürdiger Bereich führt aber auch dazu, dass man schon als Kind heftiges Interesse an Geheimnissen, Grenzen, Lügen und jeglicher Art des Leugnens entwickelt. Aus der Beherrschung seines eigenen Geheimnisses heraus schärft man seine Sinne dafür, ob nicht auch andere Geheimnisse haben, und lässt sich dazu anstecken, überhaupt danach zu fahnden, was in anderen Menschen für Verwundungen verborgen sein könnten. Da man sich selbst nicht ausdrücken kann, verschafft man sich Erleichterung dadurch, dass man etwa über das Privatleben von Prominenten Gehörtes weitertratscht oder ausplaudert, was jemand an Schuld auf sich geladen hat. Im Grunde genommen ist das ein Versuch, sich aus seiner verdammten Einsamkeit zu befreien, indem man hinausschreit, dass es auf der Welt noch andere gibt, die irgendwie so sind wie man selbst. Wenn jeder so seine eigenen Geheimnisse hat, verschafft einem das eine Art Ebenbürtigkeit, wie man sie ansonsten nicht erleben darf.

Um sich von der unendlichen Einsamkeit und inneren Isolation, in der die Homosexuellen früherer Generationen lebten, einen rechten Begriff zu machen, muss man sich auch in Erinnerung rufen, dass es damals nichts von den heutigen Möglichkeiten gab, sich zu informieren, zueinander zu finden und sich zu artikulieren, sondern man praktisch nicht wusste, ob irgendwo auf der Welt noch so jemand lebte wie man selbst, sodass man in seinem arg beschränkten Umfeld verzweifelt nach einem Ausweg suchte.

Hat man sich erst mal damit abgefunden, dass man eben nicht zu den Kindern gehört, die unter dem Joch der familiären Verhältnisse auf Dauer das nachleben, was ihre Eltern ihnen vorgelebt haben, kommt allmählich ein ganz neuer Prozess in Gang. Anstatt innerhalb einer Gesellschaft jegliches Anderssein unterdrücken zu wollen, entdeckt man die bereichernden Aspekte kultureller Vielfalt und erkennt, dass der erste Schritt in eine neue Freiheit darin besteht, sich von den eigenen Lügen zu lösen. Man hält sich nicht mehr an das, was auf der Welt so geredet wird, sondern vielmehr an das, was verschwiegen wird. Die Wahrheit steckt nämlich nicht im Sichtbaren, sondern im Verborgenen; eine Wahrheit zu verstecken, ruiniert einen in erster Linie selbst, und mit einer falschen Identität führt man nicht mehr als ein geborgtes Leben.

Wenn ich heute so viel arbeite, schreibe, produziere und über die Menschen, das Leben, die ganze Existenz so viel ausdrücken möchte, mag das auch daran liegen, dass ich in Kindertagen als stummer Wächter jenes Geheimnisses aufwuchs, das mir eine Wunde geschlagen hatte. Musste ich als Kind und Jugendlicher wie unter Wasser die Luft anhalten, so blase ich diese nun beim Auftauchen in jede neue Seite wieder hinaus. Das hört sich vielleicht etwas dramatisch an, doch sollte man durchaus darüber nachdenken. Gewissermaßen als Kind schon habe ich mich bemüht, mich selbst zu hinterfragen, in mich hineinzuhorchen, die Welt zu begreifen, in der Seele der Menschen zu lesen und ihr Verhalten zu deuten, und ich denke wohl, dass all dieses Bemühen, an mein innerstes Ich und den Ursprung meines Geheimnisses zu gelangen, mir in späteren Jahren zu bestimmten Einsichten

verholfen hat, durch die mein Schreiben in punkto Ausdruckskraft, Mannigfaltigkeit und Tiefe profitiert hat.

So wie es verschiedene Arten, Gründe und Geschichten der Homosexualität gibt, so ist auch das Alter, in dem man die eigene Homosexualität entdeckt, sich ihrer bewusst wird und sie dann auch benennt, nicht bei jedem das gleiche. Nicht jedem gelingt es, wie alt er auch sein mag, die Rolle anzunehmen, die ein Schicksal als Außenseiter ihm auferlegt hat. Schon in Jugendjahren ist es oft nicht leicht, mit eigentlich engen Freunden die Beziehungen aufrechtzuerhalten, wenn man weiß, dass sie einen insgeheim missbilligen.

So gut wie in jeder Gesellschaft und zu allen Zeiten hat man als Homosexueller mit Vorurteilen und Druck zu kämpfen gehabt, und das ist auch heute noch so. Homophobie ist noch immer die am tiefsten verwurzelte Art der Furcht und der Feindseligkeit. Und in jedem Land besteht ein gewaltiger Unterschied zwischen einem Leben in der Anonymität der Großstadt und dem Dasein in der Provinz, wo mehr oder weniger jeder jeden kennt. Man kann sich darüber unterhalten, wie relativ ungezwungen in einem relativ zivilisierten Umfeld, insbesondere im „Internetzeitalter“, eine junge Generation von Homosexuellen heute leben kann, und kann die Familien erwähnen, die - wenn es auch nicht allzu viele sind - zu ihren homosexuellen Kindern unverbrüchlich stehen. Was sich hingegen in meinem Seelenleben tat, als ich in der Türkei der sechziger Jahre aufwuchs, in einer Stadt wie dem südosttürkischen Mardin mit seinen patriarchalischen und feudalen Strukturen, und noch dazu als einziger Junge in einer sippenartigen Großfamilie, das überlasse ich der Fantasie des Lesers.

Als ganz und gar Homosexueller fühlte ich mich irgendwann in meiner Ehre gepackt und beschloss, den Rest meines Lebens über nicht scheu den Blick zu senken, sondern vielmehr der Welt in die Augen zu schauen. Es lag mir einfach nicht, mein Sexualleben so verdeckt zu führen wie ein Spion und jedermann anzulügen, denn mein Geheimnis hätte mich auf diese Weise irgendwann regelrecht vergiftet. Ich versteckte mich also nicht mehr, machte niemandem etwas vor, spielte auch mit niemandes Gefühlen, hütete aber dennoch mein Privatleben und machte daraus keine Enthüllungsshow. Die Wunden meiner Kindheit sollten mich nicht besiegen, sondern mich reifen lassen. Und so wurde ich zu dem, der ich heute bin.

Und kann als solcher nur hoffen, dass ich mit dem, was ich schreibe, irgendjemandem Halt und Stütze bin.

*Aus dem Türkischen von Gerhard Meier*

## Maxi Obexer / Italy & Germany

### ***Totally Normal***

People warned me, people tried to prepare me. And people tried to prepare me to prepare my friends, my parents, my brothers—for me, or for my new self. People told me: Everything in your life will change. Friends will avoid you, your family might reject you, you'll take on a new identity, and all in all, it won't be an easy path. It will be a path that from now on you'll walk next to the other path, the path of the majority.

It didn't scare me off—being with women felt so beautiful and exciting that I couldn't imagine that anyone wouldn't share my happiness. That summer I went home. A friend came with me. We studied together, but above all we shared writing, and this time we also shared a bed. We did so despite the fact that my mother had prepared a bedroom for her. The next morning my mother asked if she didn't want her own room. My friend answered: "Oh, Frau Obexer, it's much easier to cuddle this way." To which my mother answered: "Well, you're right about that." Yes, I was prepared, and I kept preparing myself for my serious, difficult "coming out"! I told my friends that I was dating women now, and they were glad that what they had long suspected was now out in the open. Again: none of the drama that I was supposed to be prepared for. Was it the special status that they'd accorded me as an artist? It was just normal, it seemed.

All of my later partners came with me to my parents' summer place in the mountains, where I had my own apartment. They all got along well, my girlfriends and my parents. We went on many hikes, and my father was never more gallant than when he offered my girlfriends his hand for the last step up to the summit. He liked them all, he liked them in his shy way. When was the moment to come out? For my girlfriends kept pushing me to say the words explicitly—the actions themselves weren't enough. It seemed to them that I was still hiding the truth, they thought I was being a coward. But I didn't know quite where to place these explicit words. Explicit words weren't the kind my parents were familiar with. But it seemed to me that they accepted what they saw just as they had accepted everything else I'd brought home with me: my life as a student, my life as a writer, my life elsewhere. They would only protest, I thought, if I got pregnant accidentally. As long as I was well, all seemed to be well.

But then came the day when the other shoe should have dropped: *Die Liebenden* a play I wrote, was produced in Innsbruck, and it should have made everything clear if it wasn't already. After the production, my brother asked my father how he liked it. He answered somewhat helplessly that he hadn't quite understood it. My brother, ever the enlightener, pushed. What was hard to understand about play about a love story between women? My mother jumped in: "Yeah, what's so hard to understand about that?" I felt sorry for him; they seemed to be accusing him of something, some kind of resentment that he didn't actually seem to have. And the coming out that I had prepared for was forfeit, once again.

*Die Liebenden* was expected to be a success, and many directors had already accepted that it would cause a scandal. But there was no scandal. Audiences loved it despite—or perhaps because?—of its content. Was it because I had offered them a few voyeuristic glimpses of lesbian life? The women love each other, they hurt each other, and the tragic figure is the one who can't reciprocate as strongly. The lover, on the other hand, the one overflowing with love, seems invincible, sometimes to the point of being annoying. That the love is homosexual isn't the point. Just as in my later prose and theater pieces the subject is never explicitly that characters are homosexual. Of course there are homosexual characters, as there are other kinds of characters; homosexuality is one characteristic among others. And that's the way it's received, as well. There has never yet been any criticism of the homosexuality in my work. One friend reproached me because she thought the lesbian characters didn't come off very well. I felt as if she were accusing me of betrayal. As if, in choosing to depict lesbians in theater, it was my duty to make sure I didn't show them in a negative light. It never even occurred to me. In my latest essay-novel, *Europas Längster Sommer*, I describe my own very personal experiences of migration: migration to Germany, migration to a new language, migration to homosexuality. My whole native land watched as I read from the text for the Bachmann Prize competition. Including the sentence: "Sleeping with a woman for the first time was the most beautiful and overpowering thing." Weeks later I returned to my homeland. I met people: in the village, in the city, in the mountains. No, they didn't avoid me. They were even proud of me, I was their slalom champion. No one said a word about my coming out, which I had announced publicly, in front of an entire country. I was met with blank incomprehension only from one juror, who had trouble connecting a narrative about flight and migration with a kind of migration into sexuality. He thought the narratives should be kept nicely separate: The account of migration from the story of escape and please, at all costs, keep both separate from the coming-out story. Implicit hostility does exist, and it looks the way it looked when it came from the juror: backhanded, covert, sly, patriarchal. It was directed at me not just as a lesbian author, but as a female author (who probably wasn't exactly his type). Implicit hostility is perhaps a less violent assault, but it's also less assailable.

Nonetheless, the strategy of "totally normal" feels like the right one for me. This narrative, too, should exist. A narrative that doesn't presume a stigma, and also doesn't ascribe to others any stigma, resentment, or resistance. Anyone who feels a sense of resistance has to bring it to the table themselves—I don't offer any. I assert my normality—as one political strategy among the many that are necessary.

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*



## Dino Pešut / Croatia

### Notes on queer heritage

1. Ryan Murphy, the creator of *Murder of Gianni Versace* describes Versace and his killer Andrew Cunanan as *two gay men wanting to be famous, but only one willing to work for it*. It proves the old theory for queer teens who didn't commit suicide. Either you become famous or you die. (Survivors, better forget!)

2. There is a thin line between intersectionality and *niche* production. One aims to reframe the mainstream, other aims to profit from exclusion. *Niche* production puts queer authors and women directors on small stages of big theaters or it allows only 1000 signs to explain the centuries of injustices.

3. Capitalist logic puts queer and feminist efforts and struggles at the end of history. When described as first ever, it becomes easier to market and eventually sell.

4. We should fight for possible continuities, if not heritage. Fran Lebowitz observes correctly that AIDS epidemic didn't only take the most brilliant artists, it also took the most elaborate audiences, the witnesses of *queer* cultural production.

5. NOTES TO SELF:

- Read Baldwin, Lebowitz, Genet, Koltès, Fassbinder, Woolf (and exclaim MASTERPEACE!)
- Don't let them convince you *queers* are happy, fashionable, rich bubbles of joy. We are depressed, wounded bunch.
- #never4get: there is a lot of *talentless* gay men which should be considered, represented, and in public sphere.

6. I'm queer, from Balkans, transnational intellectual and writer. Regardless if it is my local literature or international ambition (choice?) I have a set of personal demands:

- I can't simply overtake a place once held by someone else (as it doesn't exist). I have to create a completely new position.
- I don't want just to be invited into mainstream, I want to see how it changes with me.
- I want to earn my right to finally be unapologetic, angry and ungrateful.
- I want pink which doesn't evaporate. I want pink as solid as gold, as fabulous as a *faux* fur coat, and as *exxxtra* as that is basically illegal.

## **Adrian Schiop / Romania**

A rather substantial number of intellectuals in my country have liberal convictions and support LGBT artists. For example, my three novels were published at, I think, the largest publishing house in Romania, Polirom – and the last one (*Soldații / The Soldiers*) was made into a film by HiFilms, a major production house. But on the whole, Romania is conservative and homophobic enough to make being homosexual a difficult undertaking. Maybe this explains why my favorite writers are from the yesteryear – Burroughs and Kennedy Toole, both humorously, ironically, and cynically undermining their sexual identity. This kind of attitude fits Romania well – very few gay people take on an open sexual orientation; many remain in the closet and have a combative relationship with themselves; in the end, most fancy themselves bisexuals and hide themselves, bovaristically, in casual hetero relationships. Still, beside cynicism and irony, I try to give a voice to some values and basic human needs – warmth, care, guilt, pity. Similarly, I try not to write storefront, NGO literature, but prefer problematic subjects outside of the comfort zone: *Soldații*, for example, is about a poor Roma man who took to men after 14 years of abuse in prison, where he earned his pack of cigarettes by prostituting himself, who leaves prison so dehumanized and psychologically damaged that man and woman don't matter, anything goes so long as he has warmth, trust, and food. Otherwise, with my civic activism as well as with my books, I try not to limit myself to the LGBT area – capitalism, for example, unchecked since 1990, at the level of social solidarity, has left in its wake a mess of the state. The middle class – including, unfortunately, its gay area – has a major problem with poor people, including the art they make, and especially with Manele: the Roma music at the moment which created an unprecedented wave of moral panic between 2002 and 2010. As a journalist, I've written a lot about these things.

*Translated from Romanian by Andrew Davidson*

## Natalka Sniadanko / Ukraine

### Queer Literature in Ukraine: Between Boom and Taboo

Public discussion around this topic in Ukraine, whether in a literary context or elsewhere, is still relatively fresh, given that it has only just started, so that to speak of a particular tradition of queer writing now would be quite premature. LGBTQ themes tend to go hand in hand with themes of gender. Although feminism itself is not at all new to Ukraine, public perception of feminism has changed little in the past twenty years, which is how long it's really been under discussion. The word "feminist" continues to be considered pejorative; successful women often fear that they will be associated with the concept and carefully delineate themselves with statements along the lines of, "I am not a feminist, but I do think that women ought to have the right to..." In other words, in the intimate, quotidian sphere, women act and feel independent, but in public they are afraid to come out as feminists so as not to meet with ostracizing.

The situation is similar with LGBTQ concerns. Proponents of "traditional family values" consider to be pernicious and obscene not only feminism, abortion rights or the free expression of religious preference, but also, very consistently, "perverted" sexual orientations. The most progressive among them still feel that people shouldn't "air" their private lives, meaning they ought not to talk about it publicly, nor should they have any particular rights, etc. Cases of well-known people who are not afraid to talk about their unconventional sexual orientation are extremely rare, and as a rule coming out seriously damages their careers and social standing. The map of sexual orientation still sees political battles often, and the accusation of non-traditional orientation—true or false—can easily topple a political rival.

In the literary realm, there has been a slight shift from the complete taboo that was in effect until quite recently to attempts at exposure that are invariably linked with scandal. The pride parades that started to be held recently in Kyiv tend to end in physical violence, and the effort to bring them to L'viv ended in much the same. The presence of queer subjects in literature is almost always guaranteed a scandal accompanied by protests by the "adherents to traditional values" during the book's promotion, not to mention homophobic reviews and similar.

In my novel *Frau Müller Isn't Willing to Pay More*, I tried to take LGBTQ topics to the next stage in the popular imagination, meaning to normalize and familiarize such themes within literature. I deliberately avoided provocative scenes and descriptions. I managed to avoid a scandal around the book, but the reactions, including among LGBTQ populations, were of astonishment. Everyone wondered why a person without an unconventional sexual orientation would want to write about it, not to mention doing so calmly, without exploiting the LGBTQ boom at the moment.

Thus we now continue to see a rather adolescent attitude to queer subjects, with the total taboo lifted, but serious understanding still far away. It is now possible to write on these topics, but within the narrow limits of shock, scandal

and provocation to contend with topics that are still considered “perverse.” There is no ordinary, or calm, or “mature” reckoning with these matters for now.

*Translated from Ukrainian by Jennifer Croft*

## **Angela Steidele / Germany**

### **In the footsteps of a lesbian couple in Russia and Georgia**

*Women love me and have always liked me and none has ever turned me down*, wrote Anne Lister in 1816. Two hundred years later she seduced me into writing an *Erotic Biography* (Anne Lister, 2017). The free-spirited diarist was excited by distant lands just as much as by women. With her last lover, Ann Walker, Lister travelled to Russia, rode 2000 kilometers in a sleigh, across the frozen Volga to the Caspian Sea, crossed the great Caucasus and then died suddenly on a hiking trip through Georgia. To get closer to an understanding of Lister's last months, I travelled with my wife to Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan to follow her tracks. To my surprise, I found that it was easier to travel through these countries as a lesbian couple in 1840 than it is today; the hosts of lectures I gave in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Tbilisi could only send out invitations secretly, to protected mailing lists. Such experiences (and others) inspired me to write a literary account of Lister and Walker's adventures through the lens of our experiences, a text which also reflects on the inevitable failure of any journey to the past (*Zeitreisen. Vier Frauen, zwei Jahrhunderte, ein Weg*, 2018).

*Translated from German by Anne Posten*

## **Gulya Sultanova and Manny de Guerre / Russia**

Side by Side LGBT Film Festival, from the very beginning, set itself the task to educate and enlighten. Fundamentally, this was to be achieved through film and discussion, however, in the early stages of the project's implementation in 2007, it became clear that there was a major deficit of literature dedicated to the LGBTQ+ specific in Russia.

What information there was at that time and accessed with relative ease (providing an individual had access to a computer and the internet) could be found in a variety of web resources: gay.ru, lesbi.ru, xsgay.ru and queerumir.ru for example, which had first taken hold from the late 90s and gained increasing popularity throughout the early-2000s. The focus of the content, rather than providing platforms for the strong advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights in Russia, was largely light news and entertainment from around Russia and the world. These resources naturally filled an important vacuum and also facilitated the development of the LGBTQ+ community online, providing a point of contact for many people across Russia.

Side by Side, however, in the effort to empower members of the LGBTQ+ community and stimulate open and intelligent discussion on sexuality and gender identity in the public sphere, understood that the range of literature available needed to be broadly extended and made widely accessible to both the community and society at large.

In the 10 years of our existence we have published 9 booklets with varied literary content, key among them: *How to Tell and How to Understand* (2008) - giving advice on strategies of how to come out and how to accept someone who has come out, *Stories of Coming Out and Homophobia* (2009) – true recollections, positive and negative, of coming out and an in depth essay exploring the origins and manifestations of homophobic behavior, *We Have A History!* (2011) – a historical analysis (very much ignored) of the LGBT movement in Russia, *Politically Correct LGBT Terminology* (2013) – a journalist handbook encouraging the use of sensitive and correct language, *How Much Queer Work?* (2014) – a collection of LGBT comics from around the world, including contributions from many leading artists: Ariel Schrag (USA) Helene Junecic (Croatia), Elke R. Steiner (Germany) and Viktoria Lomasko (Russia) and *The Power of Cinema* (2015) – a collection of articles relating to LGBT cinema and how certain films and directors brought social and political change to LGBTQ+ in Britain, India, Israel, Russia, Holland and Sweden.

This material has been avidly consumed by our audiences and beyond. In the region of 50,000 separate items have been distributed throughout Russia. It is through this literature we are combating the homophobic and transphobic opinion circulated by the state, conservative elements, orthodox and nationalists group and winning over audiences to positions of tolerance and

respect of “others” who are considered “different” from the socially constructed “norms.”

Working very much beyond the parameters expected of a film festival, Side by Side, has successfully combined both the written and visual arts in an effort to change the discourse and bring greater freedom to LGBTQ+ communities in Russia.

## Kārlis Vērdiņš/ Latvia

### Heroes and Role models in Latvian Queer History: Six Thesis

- The first important figure in Latvian queer cultural history is Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908), our first important realist prosaic and playwright who lived as a bachelor, being emotionally involved with his male friends and occasionally allowing himself to speak about such feelings in his work.
- The modern concept of homosexuality entered the Latvian public discourse in 1907 because of the Harden – Eulenburg scandal in Germany. It introduced the readers of Latvian newspapers to the very notion of the same-sex relationship as a medical and judicial phenomenon, however, with no empathy towards the homosexuals.
- At that time, there are evidences of several homosexuals being active in Latvian theater scene. Among them was Aleksis Mierlauks (1866–1943), the founder of Latvian modern theater directing, Roberts Tautmīlis-Bērziņš (1873–1915), actor, director and the first chronicler of Latvian theater as well as talented actor Viļums Vēveris (1881–1910) who committed suicide in Tiergarten, Berlin after working at German theaters in Köln and Posen.
- In the interwar period of the Republic of Latvia, male same-sex relationship was still criminalized. The scandal of so called “Black Carnation” started when several gay men were arrested in November, 1926, at an apartment in Riga Old Town which they used to attend to socialize. The case of three of those men was taken to court, and it ended with a month of imprisonment of just one of them.
- There was a community of left-wing writers, intellectuals and artists which was open to queerness. Their patron was Austra Ozoliņa-Krauze, a lesbian woman, socialist activist, writer and patroness of the workshop of modernist artists “Baltars.” One of them was Sam-Hiors (1906–1955), Jewish-Latvian pioneer of the modern dance who was famous for his oriental “dances of ecstasy.”
- Latvian politician Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942), the authoritarian president of Latvia (1934–1940) was rumored to be homosexual. Such opinion was held by Latvian Social Democrats even before his presidency. However, no proof has been found on that yet.



## Biographies

**Zsófia Bán** was born in 1957 in Rio de Janeiro and grew up in Brazil and Hungary. Working as a writer, essayist, literary and art critic, Bán made her fiction debut in 2007 with *Esti iskola* (Night School: A Reader for Grown-ups), followed by *Amikor még csak az állatok éltek* (When there were only animals, 2012). Her short stories have been widely anthologized, including in the collection of Best European Fiction 2012, and have been translated into several languages, including German, English, Spanish and Portuguese among others. Her first two books of fiction have both come out in German (*Abendschule*, 2012, *Als nur die Tiere lebten*, 2014, Suhrkamp), both translated by Terézia Mora. Her most recent volume of short stories is *Lehet lélegezni!* (You can breathe now!, [Weiter atmen!] 2018, Magvető Publisher). Bán lives and works in Budapest, where she is an associate professor in the department of American studies at Eötvös Loránd University.

**Jürgen Bauer** was born in 1981 and lives in Vienna. His debut novel "Das Fenster zur Welt" was published in 2013, followed by "Was wir fürchten" in 2015 and "Ein guter Mensch" in 2017. His journalistic work on theatre, dance and opera appears regularly in international newspapers and magazines. Bauer has received numerous scholarships and awards, including a residence grant from the Berlin Literary Colloquium in 2014. In 2017 he was invited to the New Literature Festival in New York and the Zeitgeist Festival in Washington D.C.

**Nikolaj Bojkov**, born 1968 in Vidin, studied Hungarian philology and has worked across the spectrum as a cook, truck loader, interpreter in a sewing factory, librarian, Hungarian teacher, journalist, model at the art academy, book and newspaper delivery, copywriter, bookseller, translator, guard, window cleaner, childcare worker, courier, franchise provider, PR and advertising assistant, personal assistant to physically handicapped people, editor, waiter and as a barque worker. In 2000 he came out with his first literary work *Metaphysics*, followed by other volumes on poetry "Poems with Biography" (2003), "Declared in Love" (2005). In 2006 he published his prose "Letters to Petar" and in 2010 "The book of life."

**Lavinia Branîște**, born 1983 in Brăila, in the southeast of Romania, lives in Bucharest and works as a literary translator. She has published two collections of short stories "Cinci minute pe zi" (Five Minutes a Day, 2011) and "Escapada" (Escapade, 2014), a novel (*Interior zero*, 2016) and three children's books. Some of her short stories have been translated into English, French, Portuguese, Croatian and Bulgarian. *Interior zero* was awarded the "Nepotul lui Thoreau" ("Thoreau's Nephew") prize for the best Romanian novel of 2016.

**Traude Bührmann** was born 1942 in Essen, Germany. She has worked in the early 1970s as a foreign correspondent in London, Paris, India, and Nepal. She returned to Berlin in 1973 to study sociology and later worked as an editor at the feminist magazine "Courage". She co-founded the *Lesben.Kultur.Etage* Araquin and co-organized the travelling exhibition *Lesbian Connexions*. Her

prose and essays engage with various queer and feminist topics. Bührmann also works as a photographer, translates from French and organizes literature gatherings and workshops.

**Ebru Nihan Celkan**, born in 1979, is an author and teaches dramatic writing at Sabanci University in Istanbul. In her plays, the playwright deals with Turkish society, its taboos and grievances. In 2017 she became one of the four playwrights chosen from around the world for Maxim Gorki Theatre's International Playwriting Project "Krieg Im Frieden – War in Peace". As part of this project, currently she is continuing her studies with NIDS. She lives in Istanbul.

**Neringa Dangvyde** is a specialist for children's literature and an author of numerous literary articles and reviews. She has participated in major literary and cultural conferences and is a member of the National Book Evaluation Committee in Lithuania. She is also a member of the Lithuanian Writers Union and has written two books for children: „Gintarinė širdis“ (The Amber heart, 2013) and „Vaikas su žvaigžde kaktoje (The Child With a Star on His Forehead, 2016).

**Manny de Guerre** is the founding organiser of the Side by Side LGBT Film Festival, over the last 11 years she has been responsible for overseeing the direction and management of the film festival. Among some of the key responsibilities are the creative direction of the festival, film programming, developing projects and strategies, fundraising and establishing contact with potential partners, sponsors and organizations with the view for collaboration and building relations both at local and international levels. She has carried out extensive research in Russia concerning the importance of arts and culture in terms of its social, political and psychological significance.

**Jacek Dehnel** is a Polish poet, writer, translator and painter. He was born in 1980 in Gdansk and studied literature and philosophy in Warsaw. He gained international prominence with his 2006 novel "Lala". Dehnel received the Koscielski-award in 2005 and his collection of poems "Ekran kontrolny" ("Control screen") was nominated for the NIKE prize - the most important literature prize in Poland. Dehnel lives and works in Warsaw.

**Marie Feryna**, born 1993, is a poet, publicist, activist. Her texts have been published in various Czech literary journals and have been translated into Romanian, Polish and German. In 2016 she made her debut with the volume of poems *Před setřením* published by Dauphin. Feryna is part of the impro music group *Krajní levice*, in 2017 she founded the collaborative queer project *A X I S*. Her second volume of poems was published in 2018 by Adolescent Verlag under the title *Osa*.

**Karen-Susan Fessel**, born 1964 in Lübeck, studied Theater, German and Romance Studies at the Free University Berlin. Since 1993 she has been working as a writer, journalist and lecturer, holding seminars and writing-workshops. She has published extensively on children and youth issues and has been translated in many languages, her first novel "Und Abends mit

Beleuchtung" was published in 1994, followed by her first book for children "Ein Stern Namens Mama" 1999. She has been nominated and awarded with numerous prizes renowned among them the nomination for the German Youth literature prize in 2003 and the nomination for Women's pride award for the best German author in 2003 and the 2005 Taiwan Book award for her work Steingesicht and the Rosa-Courage-Preis 2011.

**Davit Gabunia**, born 1982 in Poti, Georgia, is one of the most prominent young Georgian playwrights and novelists. Gabunia's work often deals with the deconstruction of traditional gender roles in modern Georgian context. He has also translated Shakespeare, Strindberg and Sarah Kane into Georgian. Together with Data Tavadze, he works as dramaturg at the Royal District Theatre Tbilisi. He was awarded with the Duruji theatre prize twice and received the most prominent Georgian literature prize SABA in 2015. After a successful prose debut with "Colors of the Night", he is currently working on his second novel.

**Anja Golob** born in 1976 is a Slovenian poet. She studied philosophy and comparative literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She published theatre critiques in the newspaper *Večer* for 12 years, and since July 2018 she is back as one of their monthly columnists. In 2013 she co-founded *VigeVageKnjige*, an independent publishing house specializing in graphic novels, where she now works as the editor-in-chief. She has so far published 3 volumes of poetry in Slovene (*V roki* - 2010, *Vesa v zgibi* - 2013, *Didaskalije k dihanju* - 2016), and a poem in six parts, which she co-wrote in German via e-correspondence with Nikolai Vogel (*Taubentext, Vogeltext* - hochroth, 2018). 13 poems from *Vesa v zgibi* are available in German under the title *ab und zu Neigungen* (hochroth, 2015). The translation of *Didaskalije k dihanju* will come out this October at Edition Korrespondenzen. She received the Jenko Poetry Prize in 2014 and 2016.

**Samanta Gorzelnik**, born 1978 in Leipzig, is a translator and research associate for German-polish culture and literary relations and gender studies at the University of Viadrina. Gorzelnik studied Polish Studies and European Ethnology in Berlin followed by Slavic Studies and empirical cultural Studies at Warsaw and Tübingen. She co-founded the queer University group in Tübingen and has published on gender issues.

**Volya Hapeyeva**, born 1982 in Minsk, is a Belarusian poetess, playwright, critic and philosopher. Hapeyeva studied linguistics and writes poetry, prose, plays and books for children. She has collaborated with techno DJ's for her lyrical poetry and has been translated into more than ten languages. Recently she published a volume of poetry in 2017.

**Patricia Hempel** was born 1983 and studied prehistoric archaeology and creative writing in Berlin and Hildesheim. She was the city-writer of Wolfsburg in 2014 and published texts in magazines, journals and anthologies. Her first novel "Metrofolklore" was published in 2017, and addresses the topics of female love and desire, as well as having children in a same-sex-relationship. Patricia lives and works in Berlin as a free author and journalist.

**Fabian Hischmann** was born 1983 in Donaueschingen and studied creative writing and cultural journalism in Hildesheim and at the Literature Institute in Leipzig. His 2014 novel "Am Ende schmeißen wir mit Gold" was nominated for the Prize of the Leipzig book fair and he received a scholarship by the Art foundation of Baden-Württemberg. Fabian's second novel, "Das Umgehen der Orte" was published in 2017. He lives and works in Berlin.

**Kristina Hočevár**, born in 1977, is a poet, whose regular job is teaching Slovenian at several secondary schools in Ljubljana. She also proofreads translated literary texts and translates literature from English. She is the author of six poetry collections. Her third poetry collection *Little Tails* received the Zlata ptica Award, and her poetry collection *Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips* received the Jenko Award. In 2014, Zavod Gulag published a three-way art book combining her poetry and original graphics by Gorazd Krnc. Kristina Hočevár is also one of the poets involved in the poetry platform Versopolis. Her poems have been featured in numerous anthologies and translated into 15 languages. In 2017 a German translation of her fifth collection has been published under the title *Auf den Zähnen Aluminium, auf den Lippen Kreide*.

**Ulrich Hub**, born 1963 in Tübingen, studied acting at the School of Music and Theatre in Hamburg. He was an actor at different theatres for five years and has been working since 1993 as stage director, playwright and author of children's books. His book "An der Arche um Acht" (At the Ark at eight") received multiple awards for children's literature and theatre. His 2016 book "Ein Känguru wie du" (A kangaroo like you") tells the story of a friendship between two cats and a gay kangaroo. Hub lives in Berlin.

**Damir Imamović** was born in 1978 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He showed interest in music since childhood, but started his professional career after finishing his studies in philosophy and after working on a book about the traditional sevdah-genre with Farah Tahirbegović. He played and recorded solo, with the Damir Imamović Trio, and since 2012 with the critically acclaimed Damir Imamović's Sevdah Takht. In 2009 he started "SevdahLab" — a travelling interactive laboratory of sevdah in which he explores history and aesthetics of this traditional art. Damir published a book "Sevdah" about the genre in 2016. He also writes music for theatre and film and was honored with "Grgo Martić" award for promoting Bosnian music in 2015.

**Uladzislau Ivanou**, born in 1978, is a Belarusian writer, politologist, sociolinguist, translator from French, researcher of the Belarusian Old Belief. He lives in Vilnius (Lithuania) and teaches at the European Humanities University. In 2016, his debut prose "Songs of the Trolley Poles" was published, it is considered to be the first gay-prose in the Belarusian literature. Uladzislau has translated the works by M. Yourcenar, G. Eekhoud as well as academic texts on sociology and political science. He is the author of the sociolinguistic feminist essay "The Belarusian Language Feminization Guide" (2017). In 2018 he prepared a new collection of short stories "When Bird Cherry Blossomed...".

**Lejla Kalamujić**, born in Sarajevo in 1980 where she still lives. Kalamujić graduated from the Department of Philosophy and Sociology. She's the author of the two collection of stories "The Anatomy of a Smile" and "Call Me Esteban". She is also author of contemporary socially engaged drama "Ogress, or how I killed my family". She writes prose, essays and reviews in various magazines and on web portals in B&H and EX-YU countries.

**Sergej Khasov-Cassia**, lives in St. Petersburg and works as a journalist at the Moscow office of the Liberty Radio. His semi-autobiographical novel dealing with the experience of growing up as a homosexual in Russia was on the longlist of a literary award in 2010 but was categorized as 'politically sensitive' and was eventually not published.

**Johannes Kram** was born 1967 in Trier. Since 2009 he is writing the Nollendorfblog (named after a square in Berlin's gay quarter) under the motto "Ich hab ja nichts gegen Schwule, aber..." ("I have nothings against gays, but..."), which is also the title of his 2018 book. In his texts, Kram tackles the "awfully nice homophobia" of the German society and writes about the role of the LGBT-population in this society. He is one of the initiators of the Waldschlösschen-Appell against homophobia in media. Kram also writes plays and various texts about culture, society and communication. He lives and works as a free author in Berlin.

**Bojan Krivokapić** was born in 1985 in Novi Sad, Serbia. He gained his first activist and artistic experience at the Chamber Theatre of Music "Ogledalo" (2004-2010) and the International Festival of Actual Music "Interzone" (2005-2010). He graduated in comparative literature at the University of Novi Sad and completed postgraduate in gender studies at the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies at University of Sarajevo. He received several regional awards for his poetry and prose. His third book "Proleće se na put sprema" ("The Spring on the Road") was shortlisted for the best novel published in Serbia in 2017 (NIN Prize). From 2012 to 2017 he was engaged at CK13 Youth center in Novi Sad, Serbia, as editor of the literary program. Since 2017 he is working as a freelance writer.

**Kristof Magnusson**, born 1976 in Hamburg, trained as a church musician, studied at the German literature Institute in Leipzig. Magnusson currently lives and works in Berlin as a writer and translator, after many writer's residencies across the globe, translating extensively from Icelandic. He has published literary works, renowned among them the play Männerhort (Men's Daycare) 2002, his 2005 novel Zuhause (At home), followed by a second novel Das war ich nicht (It wasn't me). In 2014 Magnusson came out with an Arztroman (Doctors – a novel). He was awarded the Jane Scatcherd prize for translation in 2016.

**Murathan Mungan** was born in Istanbul in 1955 and grew up in Mardin in southeastern Turkey. After successfully completing his theatre studies at the University of Ankara, he worked at the State Theatres in Ankara and Istanbul, among others. Mungan is one of the best-known contemporary authors in Turkey and one of the most widely read authors of the younger generation.

Since his first book publication in 1980, he has published more than 30 novels, volumes of short stories and poetry. He has also written radio plays, screenplays and plays. Mungan as a narrator is however not yet widely known in the German-speaking world. He lives in Istanbul and works as a playwright and freelance writer.

**Maxi Obexer**, born 1970 in Brixen, South Tyrol, studied comparative literature, philosophy and theatre studies in Vienna and Berlin. She writes short stories, novels, plays and essays. Obexer held scholarships by the LCB, the Academy of Arts Berlin and the Academy Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. In her prose and plays Obexer addresses topics such as gender inequality and migration. She has taught at Georgetown University in USA, at the Literature institute in Leipzig and at the University of Arts in Berlin. She was awarded the eurodram-prize and the Potsdam theatre prize. She lives and works in Berlin.

**Dino Pešut** was born 1990 in Sisak, Croatia. He studied Dramaturgy at the Academy of performing arts in Zagreb. Since 2011 he has been working on numerous projects at the Youth Theatre in Zagreb, and has taken part in co-productions with artists from Pittsburgh, Braunschweig and New York. His first play "The pressures of my generation" was invited to the Forum junger Autoren Europas in Wiesbaden in 2012. For the play "(Pret)posljednja panda ili statika ("Der (vor)letzte Panda oder Die Statik") Pešut received the Marin Držić Prize by the Croatian Ministry of Culture. His first novel "Poderana koljena" ("Scratched Knees") was published in 2018.

**Karol Radziszewski** was born in 1980 in Białystok. Radziszewski lives and works from Warsaw as a painter, video and installation artist, photographer, curator and publisher. Trained in Fine arts at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in 2004 Radziszewski has created installations and interdisciplinary projects on various issues, replete with references to gender, cultural, social, historical themes. He is the founder of Queer Archives Institute and is also Editor in Chief of DIK Fagazine. His work has been displayed across the world at the National Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Kunsthalle Vienna, White Chapel gallery, London among others. In 2010 he was awarded the Polityka's Passport Award in the Visual Arts category.

**Adrian Schiop**, born in 1973, is a Romanian writer and independent journalist. He has published three novels and has a doctoral degree in manele music, a genre associated with Roma people and lower social classes and which rarely finds its place in the academic environment. His latest novel "Soldații. Poveste de Ferentari" ("The Soldiers. Story of Ferentari"), partly an autobiographic story about a gay love, takes place in Ferentari Neighborhood – a ghetto of Bucharest frozen in the '90, a social universe full of taboos and complex social relations of what can be considered the periphery of the society.

**Natalka Sniadanko** was born in 1973 in Lviv. She studied Slavic and Romanic languages in Lviv and Freiburg in Breisgau. Her debut novel "Kolekcija pristrastej" ("Collection of Passions") was published in 2004. She translates from German and Polish into Ukrainian and writes articles for Ukrainian and

international newspapers ("Lvivska Gazeta", "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Süddeutsche Zeitung"). She was awarded a scholarship by the Academy of Arts in Berlin in 2007. Natalka lives and writes in Lviv.

**Angela Steidele** was born in 1968 in Bruchsal. She studied literature, musicology and philosophy in Hildesheim and Siegen. In her dissertation she examined the love and desire between women in German-speaking literature between 1750 – 1850. In 2015 she published her first novel "Rosenstengel", which was awarded with the Bavarian book prize. She received a Grenzgänger Scholarship by the Robert-Bosch-Foundation for the research for the "erotic biography" of Anne Lister – the first part of her trilogy about biographic writing. The second part of the trilogy "Zeitreisen" (Time travels) was published in 2018. Steidele lives and works in Cologne.

**Gulya Sultanova's** field of specialization is German Studies and she has worked for a considerable period of time as a translator and teacher of German language. Since 2005 Gulya has been active in the public sphere firstly organizing youth exchange programs and in 2008 her attention shifted to LGBT activism.

**Kārlis Vērdiņš** was born in 1979 in Riga. He graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture and has a PhD in Latvian Literature from the University of Latvia. Currently he is a graduate student in Comparative Literature, the track for international writers, at the Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where he is working on his first novel. He has published poetry collections; his monograph *The Social and Political Dimensions of the Latvian Prose Poem* was published by Pisa University Press in 2010. He is a co-editor of the collection of articles *Queer Stories of Europe* (with Jānis Ozoliņš, 2016). His book *Tētis* was included in the children book list *White Ravens 2017* by the International Youth Library in Munich as well as the IBBY Honor List 2018 by the International Board on Books for Young People.